

The Believer and Drinking

Updated July 1, 2014 (first published January 3, 2013) (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article)

The following is from the **ONE YEAR DISCIPLESHIP COURSE**, which features 52 lessons in Christian living. It can be broken down into sections and used as a new converts course, an advanced discipleship course, a Sunday School series, a Home Schooling or Bible Institute course, or for preaching outlines. The lessons are thorough, meaty, and very practical. There is an extensive memory verse program built into the course, and each lesson features carefully designed review questions. Following are some of the lesson titles (some subjects feature multiple lessons): Repentance, Faith, The Gospel, Baptism, Eternal Security, Position and Practice, The Law and the New Testament Christian, Christian Growth and Victory, Prayer, The Armor of God, The Church, The Bible, The Bible's Proof, Daily Bible Study, Key Principles of Bible Interpretation, Foundational Bible Words, Knowing God's Will, Making Wise Decisions, Christ's Great Commission, Suffering in the Christian Life, The Judgment Seat of Christ, Separation - Moral, Separation - Doctrinal, Tests of Entertainment, Fasting, Miracles, A Testing Mindset, Tongues Speaking, The Rapture, How to Be Wise with Your Money, The Believer and Drinking, Abortion, Evolution, Dressing for the Lord. Available from Way of Life Literature -- www.wayoflife.org.

MEMORY VERSES: *Proverbs 20:1; 23:19-21; 29-31; 1 Corinthians 10:32-33; 1 Thessalonians 5:22*

Introduction

1. Most professing Christians believe that drinking is acceptable "in moderation." This is true generally for Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans, and for a growing number of Emerging Church Evangelicals. For example, the book *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives* contains probably a dozen references to the joys of drinking. The contributors are Karen Ward, Mark Driscoll, John Burke, Dan Kimball, and Doug Pagitt. They meet in bars and taverns for theological discussions, and they exchange beer-making techniques.

2. The word *wine* in the Bible is a generic term like *cider*. Sometimes it means grape juice; sometimes it means alcoholic wine. The word wine often refers to alcoholic wine, but not always.

The following verses prove that the word “wine” can mean fresh grape juice: Deuteronomy 11:14; 2 Chronicles 31:5; Nehemiah 13:15; Proverbs 3:10; Isaiah 16:10; 65:8; Jeremiah 48:33. Non-alcoholic wine is called “the fruit of the vine” (Matthew 26:29).

The late Dr. Bruce Lackey said, “The context will always show when ‘wine’ refers to alcoholic beverages. In such cases, God discusses the bad effects of it and warns against it. An example would be Genesis 9, which describes Noah’s experience after the Flood. Verse 21, ‘and he drank of the wine, and was drunken,’ clearly refers to alcoholic beverage.”

Further, the alcoholic content of alcoholic wine in Bible times varied greatly. Sometimes the wine was watered down with one part wine to two and three parts water.

Thus, when Jesus turned water into “wine” (John 2:1-11) and when the apostle Paul counseled Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach’s sake (1 Timothy 5:23), this does not necessarily refer to alcoholic wine. (For more on this see “Did Jesus Make Alcoholic Wine?” at the Way of Life web site.)

For the following reasons we believe that the Bible teaches that the New Testament Christian should abstain totally from alcoholic drinks:

1. The Bible warns that wine is a mocker and deceives men (Proverbs 20:1).

To say that alcoholic beverages can be consumed in moderation sounds reasonable, but very few drunks have ever set out to become drunks. It is an irrefutable fact that a man that does not drink at all will never get drunk and will certainly never become a drunk.

As Bruce Lackey said, “How is alcoholic wine deceptive? In the very way that people are advocating today, by saying that drinking a little bit will not hurt. Everyone admits that drinking too much is bad. Even the liquor companies tell us not to drink and drive, but they insist that a small amount is all right. However, that is the very thing that is deceptive. Who knows how little to drink? Experts tell us that each person is different. It takes an ounce to affect one, while more is necessary for another. The same person will react to alcohol differently in different situations, depending on the amount of food he has had, among other things. So the idea that ‘a little bit won’t hurt’ is deceptive, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise!”

I doubt Noah planned to get drunk and to cause so much trouble for his grandson, trouble that has abiding consequences to this day -- but wine is a mocker.

My maternal grandfather came from a long line of drunks, and before my grandmother married him she made him promise that he would never touch a drop of liquor, and that is a promise that he made. But one day he and another carpenter were working on a house and the other fellow talked my grandfather into having just a sip “to cool the tongue.” They both got roaring drunk and ended up in jail, and my granddad was a deacon in a Baptist church! He was deeply

repentant and was restored and never drank another drop as far as anyone knows, but it was a powerful reminder that wine is a mocker.

Alcohol has the ability to deceive and corrupt. One can never know if he will control it or it will control him. The instruction in Proverbs 20:1 tells me that the wise man leaves it entirely alone.

The following is a wise statement from John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides, 1891:

“From observation, at an early age I became convinced that mere Temperance Societies were a failure, and that Total Abstinence, by the grace of God, was the only sure preventive as well as remedy. What was temperance in one man was drunkenness in another; and all the drunkards came, not from those who practised total abstinence, but from those who practised or tried to practise temperance. I had seen temperance men drinking wine in the presence of others who drank to excess, and never could see how they felt themselves clear of blame; and I had known Ministers and others, once strong temperance advocates, fall through this so-called moderation, and become drunkards. Therefore it has all my life appeared to me beyond dispute, in reference to intoxicants of every kind, that the only rational temperance is Total Abstinence from them as beverages, and the use of them exclusively as drugs, and then only with extreme caution, as they are deceptive and deleterious poisons of the most debasing and demoralizing kind.”

Even emerging church people admit that the Bible forbids drunkenness, but can they guarantee that they and their drinking buddies will never get even a “little” drunk? Can they guarantee that they will not tempt someone to become an “alcoholic,” or tempt a former “alcoholic” to get “off the wagon” and destroy himself? No, they cannot, because “wine is a mocker.”

2. Alcoholic drink should be avoided because it is associated with many evils and dangers (Proverbs 23:19-23, 29-35).

This passage begins with the father urging his son to hearken to his parents and to buy the truth and sell it not (Prov. 23:22-23). The father exhorts his son to “*buy the truth*” by bending his whole heart and strength and life to it and to “*sell it not*” for any of the Devil’s shallow, deceptive enticements. This is what will protect the person from the enticement of worldly activities and places that promote “social drinking,” such as dance parties, bars, nightclubs, and taverns.

The winebibber has poverty (Prov. 23:19-21). Proverbs counsels the young man to avoid the company of winebibbers and gluttons, because they are associated with poverty. It is certain that they produce spiritual poverty, and they often produce financial poverty as well.

The winebibber has woe, sorrow, contentions (Prov. 23:29). Many of the woes in society are caused by drinking. Examples are broken marriages, lost friendships, fall from social standing, loss of finances, car and air crashes, disease, crime, stabbings, shootings, child delinquency, teenage pregnancy, bankruptcy, and suicide. One of my great uncles was a wealthy man who owned two bars and was a heavy drinker, and one day he drove up to a funeral home in his Cadillac, put a gun to his head, and killed himself.

The winebibber has babbling (Prov. 23:29). The drunk speaks nonsense and foolishness.

The winebibber has wounds without cause (Prov. 23:29). The drunkard can't remember where he was or what he did and he doesn't know how he got his wounds. He doesn't remember the fight or the crash or the fall. My wife's father crashed his car one night in Alaska when he missed a sharp turn after he had gone over a bridge. He was found staggering along the road and didn't even know what had happened.

The winebibber has redness of eyes (Prov. 23:29). He is affected in his body. His eyes are affected; his kidneys are affected; his liver is affected; his brain is affected.

The winebibber's eyes behold strange women (Prov. 23:33). This is a description of the immorality that is intimately associated with drinking. The winebibber's moral inhibitions are weakened and he is attracted to loose women. It has been said that "wine is the oil of the fire of lust."

The winebibber's heart utters perverse things (Prov. 23:33), such as cursing and bitterness and blasphemy and filthy jokes.

The winebibber is careless and foolishly fearless (Prov. 23:34). He would lie down and sleep while floating in the midst of the sea or while lying on the top of the mast of a sailing ship far above the deck. The main mast of a large ship could be 200 feet high. The drunkard drives cars and flies airplanes when he is intoxicated; he staggers along on a busy highway; he enters rowdy bars he would otherwise avoid; he challenges fierce men to a fight. In July 2010 a drunk Australian broke into a wildlife park and tried to ride a 15-foot saltwater crocodile, miraculously surviving with only a leg bite. The winebibber is careless in spending money. He is careless in morals. He is careless in running with the wrong crowd. He is careless in throwing away priceless relationships and precious friendships.

The winebibber doesn't feel pain ("*They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not,*" Prov. 23:35). The drunkard is oblivious to the pain caused by his drunken folly until he wakes up from his stupor.

The winebibber is strangely enslaved ("*when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again,*" Prov. 23:35). Before one drunken episode is barely finished he wants to seek it yet again. Even when drink has ruined his health and destroyed his marriage and thrown away his career, he usually does not quit. "It is like a deep ditch and a narrow pit, which it is almost impossible to get out of; and therefore it is wisdom to keep far from the brink of it. Take heed of making any approaches towards this sin, because it is so hard to make a retreat from it, conscience, which should head the retreat, being debauched by it, and divine grace forfeited" (Matthew Henry).

3. The Bible commands the believer not to give offense in anything (1 Corinthians 10:32-33).

I quit smoking a few months after I was saved and it was not because I thought it was inherently wrong or because I was concerned about my health; it was because I knew that it could offend others. I wanted my testimony to be pure of offence so that God would use me and I would have eternal fruit. I didn't want to be witnessing to someone and have them possibly ignore me or be distracted because they saw a pack of cigarettes in my pocket.

If that is true for smoking, and it is, then it is even truer for drinking alcoholic beverages. It is a fact that many unbelievers think that a believer should not drink. They have higher standards for Christians than some Christians have for themselves. Consider Utah, where even Mormons believe it is wrong to drink alcoholic beverages! How would Mormons look upon non-Mormon Christians who drink?

Even the possibility that someone would be offended because of his drinking should be sufficient for the believer to put it out of his life, and that possibility is very great in modern society. Paul was willing to stop eating meat entirely in this present world if he thought someone would be offended and his testimony hurt (1 Cor. 8:13), and eating meat is a perfectly legitimate activity. How much more should a believer be willing to give up alcoholic beverages, which are highly questionable at best and have the potential in themselves to cause harm (which meat does not)!

David Pratte issues the following important challenge in his report "The Bible and Use of Alcoholic Beverages."

If you drink, consider your influence on the following kinds of people:

- * Influence on young people; most start drinking because of peers and parents.
- * Influence on former addicts; if they drink at all, they will be 'addicted' again.
- * Influence on people to whom we seek to teach the gospel; how can we convert drunkards or people who know Christians should not drink?
- * Influence on all people; 1 out of 10 of people who drink will become alcoholics and far more will get drunk.

4. The Bible commands the believer to abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

That is a far-reaching exhortation. Alcoholic beverages are a great evil and curse in modern society. Consider the automobile wrecks, the ruined health and early graves, the adulteries, the lewdness, the divorces, the neglected children, the abused wives, the waste of money, the gambling, the blasphemy, the pure foolishness. Look at the beer and liquor ads, how they invariably flaunt sensuality and irresponsibility.

According to an April 2010 report, vodka consumption in Russia is an epidemic. The average Russian drinks from 15 to 18 liters of hard liquor annually, which reduces the average life expectancy by a decade. For Russian men, the life expectancy is just 61.8 years. In January 2005 the Royal College of Physicians in England warned that Britain is suffering from an epidemic of

alcohol-related problems that is fueling violence and illness throughout the country (*The Telegraph*, Jan. 3, 2005). The same epidemic is raging throughout the world. In 2014, the World Health Organization reported that 3.3 million people die each year because of alcohol. That's more than die of AIDS, tuberculosis, and violence combined. "Including drunk driving, alcohol-induced violence and abuse, and a multitude of diseases and disorders, alcohol causes one in 20 deaths globally every year." That's one death every 10 seconds.

If anything has the appearance of evil today, it is alcoholic beverages, and the Bible does not *suggest* that we abstain from all appearance of evil; it *commands* us to do so!

5. There is a difference between the alcoholic content of wine today and that of Bible times. Alcoholic wine in Bible times was often weak. It was not uncommon to mix one part wine with two or three parts water. Unmixed wine was the strong wine with high alcoholic content (Rev. 14:10).

"Many wine-drinking Christians today mistakenly assume that what the New Testament meant by wine is identical to wine used today. This, however, is false. In fact, today's wine is by biblical definition strong drink, and hence is forbidden in the Bible. ... Even ancient pagans did not drink what some Christians drink today" (Norman Geisler, *Focus in Missions*, Sept. 1986).

"To consume the amount of alcohol that is in two martinis today, by drinking wine containing three parts water to one part wine (the biblical ratio) a person would have to drink over twenty-two glasses" (Robert Stein, *Ibid.*).

"A one-ounce 'shot' of whiskey (50% alcohol) contains as much alcohol as one glass of modern wine (10-23% alcohol) or as one can or bottle of beer (4-6% alcohol). Should a Christian drink a shot of whiskey? If not, why would it be acceptable to drink a glass of wine or a can of beer?" ("The Bible and Use of Alcoholic Beverages," GospelWay.com).

Conclusion

1. We do not believe that Jesus drank or made alcoholic wine. First of all, priests and kings were forbidden to drink alcoholic beverages (Lev. 10:9; Prov. 31:4-5), and Jesus is both Priest and King. Second, the Bible warns that alcoholic wine is a mocker (Prov. 20:1), and Jesus did not come to mock people. Third, the result of the miracle shows that Christ did not make alcoholic wine (John 2:11). By this miracle Christ showed forth His glory as the holy Messiah and caused the disciples to believe in Him. This would not have been the case had He provided alcoholic wine that would have made drunken people even drunker!

2. While it is true that the Israelites were allowed to drink alcoholic wine and strong drink on occasions (e.g., Deut. 14:26), this does not mean that it is God's will for His people to do so today. The New Testament believer has a higher standard of living. The law of Moses made provision for polygamy, for example, but the New Testament nowhere makes such a provision.

3. There is no need for a Christian to drink alcoholic beverages. It adds nothing of value to his life.

4. We live in a world filled with danger (1 Peter 5:8). We have great spiritual enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is wise to avoid anything that would produce spiritual weakness and put us in harm's way.

5. We live in an hour of great apostasy (2 Timothy 4:3-4). The reason the emerging church loves to drink is that they boast of liberty and live according to their own lusts in fulfillment of Paul's prophecy. It is foolish to follow this example.

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE BELIEVER AND DRINKING

1. The word *wine* in the Bible is a _____ term.
2. What are two verses that prove that the word "wine" can mean fresh grape juice?
3. How can we tell whether wine means grape juice or alcoholic wine?
4. What are five reasons why we believe that the New Testament Christian should practice total abstinence?
5. What verse warns that wine is a mocker and deceiver?
6. If a man never drinks will he become a drunkard?
7. How are alcoholic beverages deceptive?
8. What chapter of Proverbs describes all of the evils associated with drinking?
9. What does the Bible mean when it warns us not to give offence to others?
10. What verse instructs the believer to abstain from all appearance of evil?
11. What is the difference between wine in Bible times and alcoholic wine in modern times?
12. What are three reasons why we believe that Jesus did not make alcoholic wine?
13. What passage warns that apostate Christians will live according to their own lusts?

Distributed by Way of Life Literature Inc.'s Fundamental Baptist Information Service, an e-mail listing for Fundamental Baptists and other fundamentalist, Bible-believing Christians. Established in 1974, Way of Life Literature is a fundamental Baptist preaching and publishing ministry based in Bethel Baptist Church, London, Ontario, of which Wilbert Unger is the founding Pastor. Brother Cloud lives in South Asia where he has been a church planting missionary since 1979. OUR GOAL IN THIS PARTICULAR ASPECT OF OUR MINISTRY IS NOT DEVOTIONAL BUT IS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO ASSIST PREACHERS IN THE PROTECTION OF THE CHURCHES IN THIS APOSTATE HOUR. This material is sent only to those who personally subscribe to the list. If somehow you have subscribed unintentionally, following are the instructions for removal. The Fundamental Baptist Information Service mailing list is automated. To SUBSCRIBE, go to <http://www.wayoflife.org/wayoflife/subscribe.html>. TO UNSUBSCRIBE OR CHANGE ADDRESSES, go to the very bottom of any email received from us and click "Manage My Subscription." If you have any trouble with this, please let us know. We take up a quarterly offering to fund this ministry, and those who use the materials are expected to participate (Galatians 6:6) if they can. Some of the articles are from O Timothy magazine, which is in its 29th year of publication. Way of Life publishes many helpful books. The catalog is located at the web site: <http://www.wayoflife.org/publications/index.html>. Way of Life Literature, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061.

866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org. We do not solicit funds from those who do not agree with our preaching and who are not helped by these publications, but only from those who are. OFFERINGS can be made at <http://www.wayoflife.org/wayoflife/makeanoffering.html>. PAYPAL offerings can be made to <https://www.paypal.com/xclick/business=dcloud%40wayoflife.org>

WAY OF LIFE LITERATURE SHARING POLICY: Way of Life's content falls into two categories: sharable and non-sharable. Much of our material is available for free, such as the hundreds of articles at the Way of Life web site. These are sharable. Other items we sell to help fund our very expensive literature, video, and foreign church planting ministry. These are not sharable. Things that we encourage you to share include the audio sermons, video presentations, O Timothy magazine, and the hundreds of Fundamental Baptist Information Service (FBIS) articles. You are free to make copies of these at your own expense and share them with friends and family. You are also welcome to use excerpts from the articles. All we ask is that you give proper credit. Things we do not want copied and redistributed are items like the Fundamental Baptist Digital Library, the print and eBook editions of our books, etc. These items have taken years to produce at enormous expense in time and money, and we need the income from the sale of these to help fund the ministry. We trust that your Christian honesty will preserve the integrity of this policy.